

CHILD'S PLAY

Designers prove that children's rooms can be sophisticated with the right colours and furnishings

BY SUSAN SEMENAK

CHILDREN'S ROOMS used to be oh-so-sweet and cute, girlish or boyish, a circus of colour. But contemporary designs for infants and children steer away from kitsch and cliché and often hew to gender-neutral palettes.

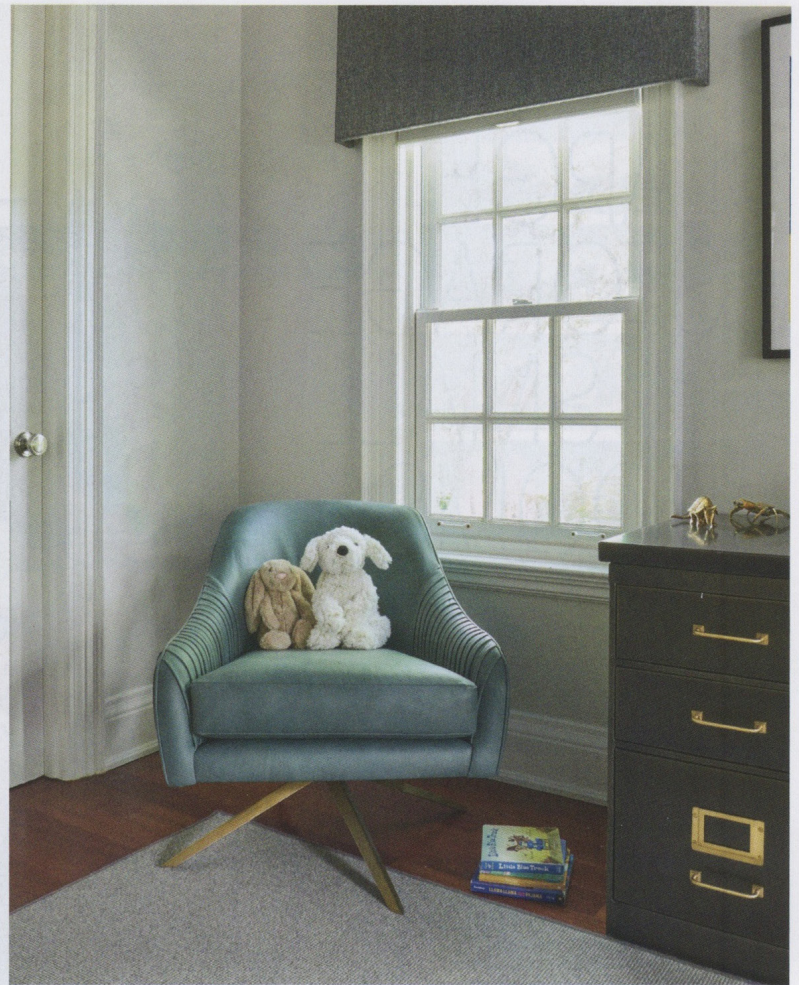
Now, the best rooms for babies and children are subdued, serene spaces that are also playful and whimsical – and timeless enough to grow along with their inhabitants.

We spoke to five interior designers and stylists who create textured, joyful, calming spaces where children and their parents want to cozy up. They say the best children's rooms balance ample display space for visual interest with plenty of storage to eliminate clutter. They include hooks to help children learn to hang up their clothes, and baskets, bins, and under-the-bed solutions in which to stow toys. And they always include a comfy spot or two – a daybed, an armchair or a “cushion corner” on the floor for snuggling up with a book, a stuffed animal and a blanket.

While some clients want rooms that are distinctly masculine or feminine, others request gender-neutral rooms that will serve more than one baby over the years. →

Designer Melissa Barling hid a potential danger – an unused fireplace – behind plywood painted with black chalkboard paint, which will do double duty when the child is old enough to create his own artwork. She added pillows to create cozy spaces for relaxing. Among them is a knot pillow that resembles soft sculpture.





Designer Meghan Carter opted for dressers instead of nightstands by the bed, to maximize storage space for clothes and toys. The bed features a trundle below the mattress. The designer spent a lot of time looking for the right chair before finding this one, in easy-to-clean blue leather. It's low enough for the little boy to get into himself but comfortable enough for his parents when they read to him. Dressers: Crate and Barrel Kids; leather chair: West Elm.

**Meghan Carter,
Meghan Carter Design, Toronto**

Don't let children pick their own paint colours, Meghan Carter warns. Though she loves to create rooms that jive with a child's interests, she counsels clients to keep the dominant hues subdued – in wall colours, bedding and furniture. “Children love saturated, bright colours and if you let them have their say, you end up with bubble gum pink or Easter egg purple – colours that are not very pleasant to live with,” she says. “We take those favourite colours and tone them way down

into much more subdued hues that are more sophisticated. Then we bring in fun sheets and toss pillows and accessories.”

In one recent project, Carter installed deep-blue wallpaper with constellations for a little boy fascinated with astronomy. But it's a sophisticated Ralph Lauren wallpaper that isn't childlike. To continue the far-away travel theme, blue bedside dressers with brass hardware evoke vintage steamer trunks.

“Children's rooms should be fun,” Carter says. “But they don't have to be themey.”